

**Ambassador and Mrs. Ronald Weiser  
855 Colliston Road  
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March 21, 2012

To The Committee for Families, Children and Seniors,

We want to express our full support for Autism Reform Legislation as covered in Senate Bills 414, 415 and 981.

Both Eileen (a State Board of Education member) and I have studied this issue extensively and have explored all of the alternatives. We have concluded that there are two ways to address this critical issue: through medical insurance, which is used to spread catastrophic costs using risk pools, or through the State budget. There is logic starting with the State budget since a good portion of the savings accrues to the State and K-12 schools.

We believe the compromise language in these three substitute bills accomplishes the objectives of addressing this critical issue while controlling the quality of service and containing cost.

Below is a summary of our thoughts on this matter. We urge the Committee and the full House to pass the three compromise bills and put Michigan on a path to resolve this issue.

Regards,



Ambassador Ronald Weiser (ret.)



Eileen Lappin Weiser

**Executive Summary**

Autism is a complex developmental disorder impacting over 15,000 Michigan children with another 1,000 born each year. Autism impacts 1 out of 110 children. There is no known cause or cure. Without treatment, lifetime costs are \$3.7 million or \$58 billion for Michigan. The costs of non-treatment are here today and are embedded in taxes and other societal costs. Michigan families are leaving the state for treatment, Michigan's autism trained college graduates leave to find work and Autism Speaks ranks Michigan in the top ten worst places to raise a child with autism. Twenty-nine states have passed autism legislation and most others have it on their legislative agendas, making Michigan a less competitive state for attracting and retaining a skilled work force. Most importantly, autism is the only catastrophic illness not covered by insurance in Michigan.

Without insurance there are virtually no medical therapists and access to treatment is almost non-existent. Self-pay and company self-adoption doesn't work without therapists. Without legislation the system is paralyzed. However, with assessments and therapy, 50% of the children achieve normal function and an additional 40% significantly improve. The legislation will save \$14 billion in lifetime cost, double if self-insured plans follow and they will. \$1.5 to \$3 billion in savings will go to the schools. The legislation is narrow in scope. It defines diagnostic criteria and provides only for medically supervised, evidenced-based therapies. The legislation will retain families and college graduates. Initial costs are less than 1/10 of 1% or about 58 cents per person, per month. Premiums will level off at a 0.36% increase. This is an example of making an investment to produce large savings.

**Reasons to Consider Autism Cost-Reducing Legislation**

**Economic**

Substantial lifetime savings – average is \$2 million per child.

School benefit cost savings of over \$200,000<sup>o</sup> per child.

Shifts tax dependents into tax payers. Over 50% can become independent, productive members of society and pay taxes instead of becoming wards of the state.

Businesses avoid paying lifetime medical costs for dependent adults.

Parents of children with autism become more productive employees.

Retain college graduates with autism therapy degrees.

Avoid families leaving Michigan to move to States that have coverage and therapists available

There are only two ways to spread the risk of catastrophic illness – Government through tax dollars or through insurance. Insurance is a much better alternative.

Insurance without a mandate is the same as self-insurance and is too costly for most employers or individuals

**Societal**

Only catastrophic medical condition that is not covered and specifically excluded.

Move 50% of children to normal function and mainstream; 40% more dramatically improved.

Avoid producing wards of the State with lifetime housing, supervision and medical costs.

Avoid high parental stress related medical costs and higher divorce rates in families with a child with autism.

Take burden of often uncontrollable children off the schools, allowing teachers to teach.